

HISTORY OF GURNET

THE GURNET by Herbert R.
Boardman.

The history of the Gurnet begins at the period when the Norsemen or Vikings visited our shores. According to traditions handed down by the old Norse sagas, the Viking Thorwald, son of Eric the Red, was slain by Indians and buried on this point in A.D. 100. The keel of Thorwald's ship was broken on Cape Cod, which he named "Kjalarness." After repairs had been made he sailed into a large bay within the cape and landed on "a hilly promontory overgrown with wood." "Here," he said, "it is beautiful, and here I should like to affix my abode!" He and his followers later encountered a large number of Indians and a fierce battle ensued. Thorwald was mortally wounded and as he was dying, requested that he be buried on this promontory, with two crosses planted, one at his feet and one at his head. His request was complied with and the place named "Krossaness". So spake the Icelandic sagas! Some authorities believe Krossaness to be Point Allerton at the entrance of Boston Harbor, others believe it to be Nahant, but the majority believe it is Gurnet Point.

After this episode, the Gurnet disappeared from the annals of history. The pineclad peninsula lay in lonely obscurity the winds and storms of centuries sweeping over it. Champlain and John Smith visited these shores in 1607 and 1614. Champlain described it in 1613 as 'almost an island, covered with trees, principally pine' and Captain John Smith marked the site of Plymouth on his map. The landing of the Pilgrims marks the beginning of the Gurnet's real history.

On the 16th of December 1620 (new style) an exploring party of men set forth in a small shallop from the "Mayflower" anchored in Provincetown Harbor. They cruised along the inner shores of the Cape and on December 18th had their first encounter with the Indians at present Eastham. They continued around the bay shore of Cape Cod until a violent storm overtook them, with snow, rain and a high wind. As they neared Manomet Point the hinge of the rudder broke and they were obliged to steer with oars. Master Coppin the pilot bade them to be of good cheer as he could see a harbor. As they steered across the bay and neared the Gurnet under press of sail, the mast suddenly broke in three places and the flood-tide bore them past the nose of the Gurnet into Saguish Cove. Master Coppin threw up his hands in despair and cried, "The Lord be merciful to us, I never saw this place before!" He wanted to run the shallop aground on Saguish Beach, but the seaman who steered bade those rowing to turn about as the cove filled with breakers would mean their destruction if they undertook to beach the shallop. It was late on Saturday, December 19th, when this happened. The short winter day had faded into the twilight and before dark the stricken shallop managed to make her way to Clark's Island where they went ashore.

(To be continued)